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Mrs Todd

With the season's greetings
1st Jan. 1890.

R.T.A.

Legend

of

Saint Swithin

A Rhyme for Rainy Weather

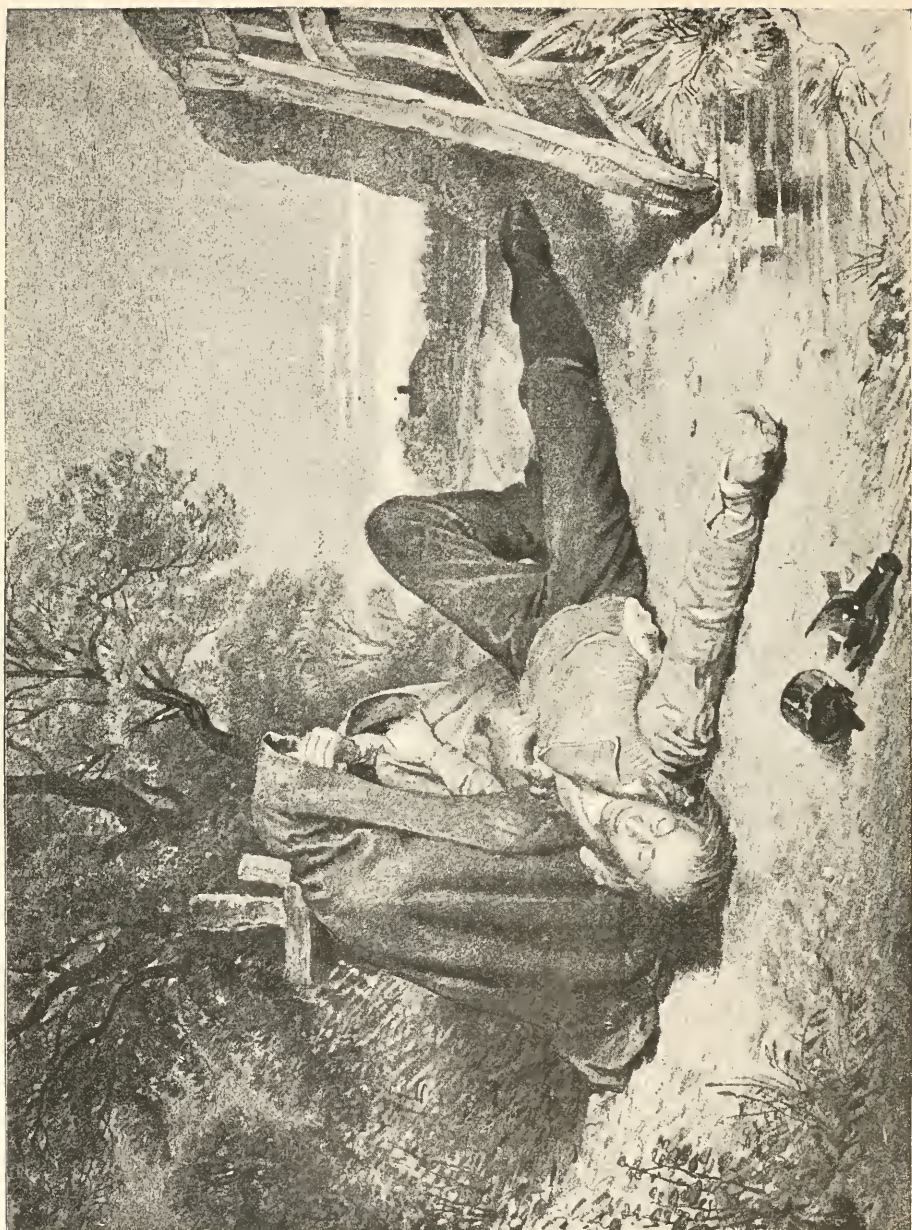
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John C. Henderson, New York

Alas! how many a precious soul
Is cast away for drink!

May 1872 No. 1, p. 20.



A RHYME FOR RAINY WEATHER

With 12 Illustrations by John Faed, Esqr. R.S.A.

Aberdeen

D. Wylie & Son

NEARLY eighteen years have now elapsed since the genial and gifted author of the "Legend of St. Swithin" was gathered to his fathers, and the circle that knew him is gradually passing away. GEORGE DAVIDSON, "the literary Bookseller" of Aberdeen, died on the 10th of May, 1872—at the age of sixty-six years, say the obituaries of the time, and just thirteen days after the decease of his younger brother, the Rev. Dr. Alexander Dyce Davidson, minister of the Free West Church, and for many years one of the foremost citizens of Bonaccord. From the Grammar School of his native city of Aberdeen, George Davidson went, early in the "twenties" of this century, to serve an apprenticeship with William Robertson, bookseller and librarian, Broad Street, then a leading man in his department of business activity. But the future "literary Bookseller" had a nimble mind and social temperament that chafed under the restrictions of the shop, and longed to go out into the world and hold freer converse with humanity. This inclination found partial satisfaction for a time in the situation of "traveller" for the Devanha Brewery; but only for a time, for the duties that devolved upon him did not permanently suit either his tastes or his physical health, and to his frequent exposure to the inclemency of the weather in the days before railways was probably attributable that weakness of the lower limbs which almost deprived him of the power of walking. Ultimately he found a more congenial sphere in the occupation of his earlier days. He began business as a bookseller in the Old Town-House Buildings, from whence he removed to King Street—the first house on the west side adjoining the North of Scotland Bank—where he remained for many years, finally, towards the close of his business career, removing to Union Street.

George Davidson was distinguished for his extensive and accurate knowledge of literature, and his brilliant powers of conversation. He was a man of original character, of generous and impulsive disposition, and of fine taste and sensibility. His humorous raillery and playful sallies of wit lent a charm to his talk. He was likewise possessor in no small degree of the literary faculty, and for many years his *jeux d'esprit* used to find their way into the local newspapers, and into some of the ephemeral publications emanating from the Aberdeen press. Occasionally they came out as broadsheets. While still engaged with the brewery he contributed to the pages of *The Censor*, which was issued by his early friend and associate, the late Mr. Lewis Smith. At a later period his most characteristic vein was struck in "The Legend of St. Swithin, a Rhyme for Rainy Weather," which originally appeared as a broadsheet. The Second Edition, with Mr. Faed's admirable illustrations, was issued in 1861, and it was reprinted in 1864. That Davidson was deeply imbued with the spirit of the old ballad literature is amply shown in this quaint Rhyme, with its apparent artlessness, its fine vein of humour, and the true literary power which it exemplifies. Mr. Davidson's next production, written in a somewhat similar style, was "Norman's Blast, a Rejected Contribution to *Good Words*" (1866)—suggested by certain utterances by Dr. Norman McLeod, with respect to the Decalogue and the Sabbath, which were then causing some stir in the ecclesiastical world. Two years later appeared his "Gladstone and the Irish Church: an Ode for the Times"—a remonstrance in the manner of Cowper's "Loss of the Royal George." Numerous pieces were directed to other topics of the day or hit off some passing fancy; and the last production known to have come from his pen was in prose—"Random Recollections of Caithness," contributed under the *nom de plume* of "A Sexagenarian" to a northern newspaper. With the modesty of his nature he loved anonymity, and shrank from the fame which his genial wit and deft literary craftsmanship brought him—for the veil of anonymity was in his case a very thin one. A notable man was the "literary Bookseller" of Aberdeen, and one whose natural gifts, had they been accompanied by a more robust physique, were fitted to carry him to high distinction.

December, 1889.

THE following metrical version of the Legend of St Swithin will be found to differ materially from the popular traditions of the Saint, both as respects the incidents narrated, and the locality assigned to them.

The author of the ballad may have had but apocryphal authority for the translation of St Swithin from the Cathedral City of Winchester to a temporary *retreat* on the banks of the Dee, and for the serious allegation that the disastrous Lammas floods had their origin in his intemperance and wrath ; but certainly the memory of the Saint is still fresh in the remembrance of many of the tenants of the low lying lands on Deeside, and they continue to watch with anxiety the aspect of the clouds on the 15th of July, assured by woful experience that a shower on that day will be followed by six weeks of continuous rains, too often causing the river to overflow its banks, and carrying away live stock, wood, and cornlands in its headlong course.

The Roman Catholic Seminary at *Blairs*, on the right bank of the Dee, about six miles from Aberdeen, is the place chosen for St Swithin's retreat. The *Abbot's Tower* may be supposed to have occupied the site of the present house of Maryculter, a mile further west, and close by the river side.

Devanha Brewery, still famous for *Ale* and *Double Stout*, stands by the *Crag Lug*, not far from the mouth of the river.

Ballochbuie Woods, the *Garawalt*, and other localities introduced, are all become well known since Deeside has been honoured as the favourite summer residence of royalty.

Aberdeen, 1860.

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“I wish your Grace good morning,
And a cool and pleasant trip.”



فقد جرّكوا إلى سجنه

Taylor & Henderson Aberdeen

"He drank a pitcher full of grog
Before his morning prayers"



"And from morn till night the Sacristan
 Did little else but jog
 With pails of water from the Dye,
 To mix Saint Swilkin's Grog"

Legend of Saint Swithin.



SAINT SWITHIN was a drouthy saint—
When in *retreat* at Blairs,
He drank a pitcher full of grog
Before his morning prayers.

And duly quaffed throughout the day—
Whene'er he told his beads ;
A pint at every *pater*,
And a gallon at the *creeds*.

And from morn till night the Sacristan
Did little else but jog
With pails of water from the Dee,
To mix St Swithin's grog.

But July came with sultry sun,
And clear and cloudless sky,
And parched up all the country round,
Till every well ran dry.

The mountain springs and tarns ran dry
And scorching drought prevailed;
The DEE dried up—the CORBY LINN—
The BURN OF CULTER failed.

And St Swithin lay perspiring,
And panting like a dog;
Yet bravely strove to count his beads,
And loudly called for grog.

And the poor bewildered Sacristan
Sought fountain, glen, and bog,
In vain for cold spring water,
To mix St Swithin's grog.



"And the poor bewildered Sacristan
Sought fountain, glen and bog"



"The spacious pond, whose crystal streams
Were watched with jealous care"

He sought mill-lades and fountains,
Through all the country round ;
But every pailful was dried up,
Save in the Abbot's pond :

The churlish Abbot's pond, well stored
With choice and costly fish—
That served on fasts and festivals
For many a savory dish ;

The spacious pond, whose crystal streams
Were watched with jealous care,
The poor Sacristan vainly sought,
To fill his pitchers there.

Then home returning weary,
To St Swithin he did say—
“ I've searched the country far and near,
This sultry summer's day ;

And there's not a drop of water left
To fill your can or cup ;
So your Reverence must give up your glass,
So long's the glass keeps up :

Unless his Grace the Abbot
Will lend us, in our strait,
A Butt of water from his pond,
Till next there comes a spate."

" Well counselled, good Sacristan ! haste,
And to the Abbot say—
Saint Swithin begs a boon of him,
And he will ever pray, &c.

With vigils and with fastings
His fainting spirits sink ;
He's sought for water everywhere,
And there's not a drop to drink :



"St. Smith!" roared the Abbot
"Fie on the drunkard's rout!"

And he begs a Butt of water,
While this sore drought prevails ;
A Butt of water from your pond,
To fill his tubs and pails :

For one Butt of water daily
He does most humbly pray ;
Which he'll return with interest
On the next rainy day."

" St Swithin !" roared the Abbot,
" Fie on the drunken rogue !
Dares he propose to drain my pond,
That he may swig his grog !

Dares he propose to drain my pond,
And starve my perch and trout ;
Nay ! let him take to *Bass's Ale*,
And *Devanha Double Stout* ;
Or, if the knave will drink Schiedam,
Let him take it *cold without*."

Such taunting answer to his prayer
Might well provoke a Saint,
And St Swithin clenched his fist, and said—
“ I'll make the churl repent.

He bids me take to *Bass's Ale*,
And *Devanka Double Stout*,
Or if I must have Hollands,
I may take it *cold without*.

And all, the paltry wretch ! to spare
His perches and his trout !
Just see in four-and-twenty hours
If I don't serve him out.

In less than four-and-twenty hours
I'll show the stingy sinner
Saint Swithin shall enjoy his grog,
When he shall want his dinner.”



Wm. Paul R.S. 225

Taylor & Henderson Boston

And St. Sn. clenched his fist and said -
I'll make the Churl repent



John Paul Jones

Jaylor & Harborsan Gordon

"But if he waked or if he slept,
No mortal tongue can tell,"
I fear he wrought some hellish charm
Or dreadful magic spell."

Then St Swithin drained his pitcher,
And emptied his last can,
And to his lonely cell he went,
I wot an angry man.

But if he waked, or if he slept,
No mortal tongue can tell,
I fear he wrought some hellish charm
Or dreadful magic spell.

For long ere the Sacristan rose
To ring the matin bell,
The morning sky grew black as night,
And rain in torrents fell.

Rain torrents poured, and thunder roared,
And lightnings gleamed o'er head ;
The streams leaped from the mountain side,
And swelled the river's bed,

The depths of BALLOCHBUIE'S WOODS,
The furious tempest stirs ;
And down the raging GARAWALT
Hurls oaks, and birks, and firs.

One hour the BRIDGE of BALLATER
The fearful onset stood ;
Then, quaking, fell with thundering crash
Beneath the foaming flood.

And far through STRATHAN, the brawling A'AN
Swept with tempestuous sough ;
And dark tumultuous waters dashed
Sheer o'er the BRIG o' FEUGH.

The CORBY LINN, with fearsome din,
Rushed o'er KINGCAUSIE'S BRAE ;
With headlong turn the CULTER BURN
Bore PIRIE'S MILLS away.



"نظر کن بر دیوار این کونیه،
 Look over the Convent wall."

Down goes the Abbot's stately tower
Beneath the boiling surge ;
And down the Abbot's spacious pond,
With all his trout and perch.

His bleating flocks, and lowing herds,
A woful sight to see ;
His corn and hay, all swept away
In the wide and wasting DEE.

And still the storm is gathering,
And still the torrents fall ;
When St Swithin, in his Mackintosh,
Looks o'er the convent wall.

He sternly eyes the mighty stream
That heaves from bank to brae,
And sees the Abbot, 'midst the tide,
Perched on a cole of hay.

Perched on a cole, and struggling sore,
He strives to keep afloat,
Still shouting as he scours along,
“ Ho ! help—a boat—a boat ! ! ”

Up starts the old Sacristan,
As rose the desperate shout—
“ It is his Grace the Abbot’s cry,
Haste, haste, and pull him out ! ”

“ Nay,” cried St Swithin, “ give the churl
His fill of *cold without*,
And should he reach *Devanha* safe—
Of which I have some doubt—
Let him take a glass of *India Ale*,
Or a pot of *Double Stout*.”

Then, pointing to his flowing can,
Quoth he, “ I rather think
'Tis to your Grace’s courtesy
We owe our morning’s drink.”



"Still shouting, as he scours along
"Ho! help, - a boat! a boat!"



J. H. Ford N.Y. 1852

Taylor & Henderson N.Y.

*"I wish your grace good morning,
And a cool and pleasant trip."*

And raising, with a horrid grin,
The pitcher to his lip—
“ I wish your Grace good morning,
And a cool and pleasant trip.”

And as the hapless voyager
Was lost amidst the fog—
“ So fare it with all churls,” said he,
“ Who grudge the Saints their grog.”

July, that fifteenth dismal day,
This fearful spate began,
And forty days, and forty nights,
Rains fell, and torrents ran.

For forty days, and forty nights,
The wide and wasting DEE
Rushed o'er her banks, and swept her plains,
From CRATHIE to the sea.

Legend of Saint Swithin.

And fertile lands were turned to sands,
And smiling haughs to bog,
And all because St Swithin vowed,
They SHOULD not stop his grog.

And ever since, whene'er a shower
Falls on St Swithin's day,
'T will pour for forty days on end—
So ancient ladies say.



Moral.

NOW all ye jolly toppers
Who read this truthful tale,
Beware of deep potations
Of grog, and stout, and ale.

Take warning from St Swithin's drouth—
His dire revenge—and think
What fearful lengths that man will go,
Who gives himself to drink !

Strong drink—that bows the strong man
Before he reach his prime ;
That turns him to a maudlin sot,
Or steeps him deep in crime.

Strong drink—that fills the madhouse ;
Strong drink—that crams the jail ;
Strong drink—that turns God's blessed earth
Into a raging hell !

Strong drink—that feeds the brothel ;
Strong drink—that crowds the pave ;
Strong drink—that gluts the lazar-house,
And heaps the early grave :

Legend of Saint Swithin.

That sweeps its victims down the stream,
Till in the gulf they sink ;
Alas ! how many a precious soul
Is cast away for drink !

And the lesson young and old may learn,
From the churlish Abbot's fate,
Is—never to refuse to help
A neighbour in his strait :

Nor call him by such naughty names
As knave or drunken rogue,
'Though he should now and then imbibe
An extra glass of grog.

Before we judge our neighbour's cause,
First let us look within,
Perchance we harbour in our heart
Some secret, darling sin :

Some pleasant and congenial vice
We nurse as fondly there,
As the Abbot nursed his favourite fish,
And spurned St Swithin's prayer.

A day will come with lurid skies,
A dark and dismal day,
When winds will beat, and floods will rise,
And all our refuges of lies
And shams be swept away,
And hurried headlong down that stream,
As stubble, wood, and hay.



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